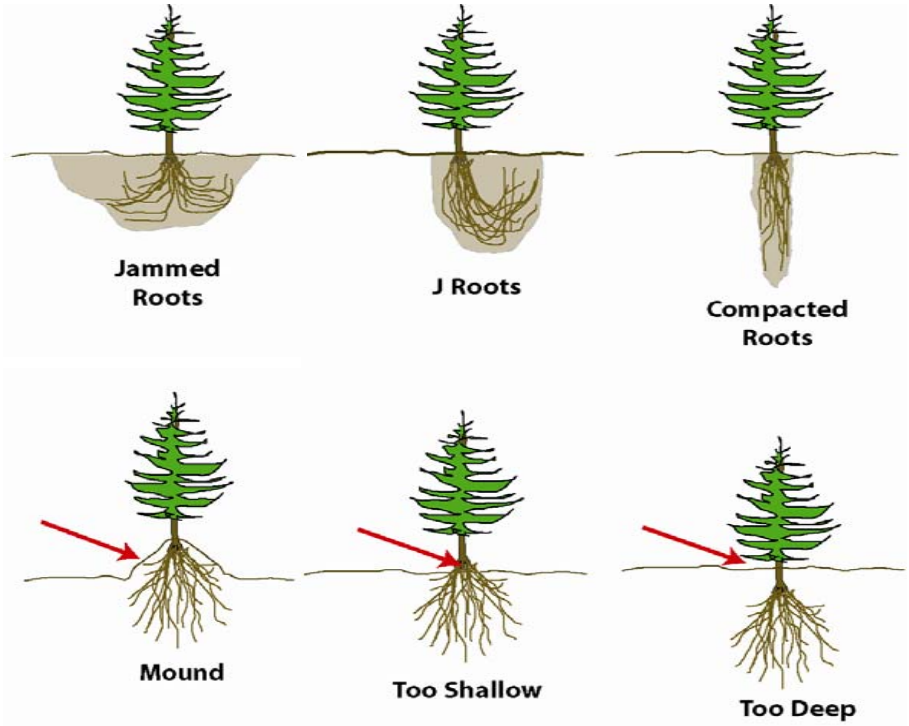
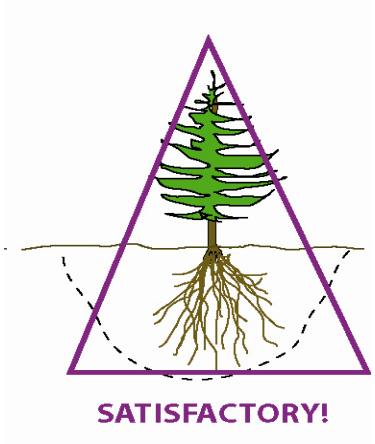
Improper Planting Techniques



The Proper Way to Plant



No need to fertilize or amend soils in a planting hole.
Simply water and mulch with compost, wood chips or bark.

TREE & SHRUB PLANTING

Proper planting and care of new trees and shrubs is essential for survival and good growth. This applies to the planting of expensive ornamental trees and inexpensive bare-root seedlings. Included in this brochure are tips on when to plant, how to prepare a planting site, and how to care for new plantings.

The larger the plant, the greater the transplant shock and risk to your investment. Large plants cost a lot more and require much more effort to put in the ground and care for. Typically, young seedlings will establish and begin growing much quicker than large container stock.

The goal is to minimize transplant shock and competition from less desirable vegetation. Plant roots should never be allowed to dry out. Water container stock thoroughly the night before transplanting. Soak bare-root stock in water for 2-4 hours immediately before planting.

Dig a hole about twice the diameter of the root ball and deep enough to fit the roots without cramming. Backfill with loose soil, gently tamping so no air pockets remain. Water thoroughly and mulch. Site preparation is described on the next two pages.

For sources of native plants contact local nurseries throughout the year. Clallam Conservation District sells bare-root native trees and shrubs each winter. Plants should not be dug from the wild unless they are being salvaged because of planned clearing of a site or the plants otherwise need to be removed.

The native trees and shrubs commonly found in Clallam County are listed and described in two companion brochures: *Common Native TREES of Clallam County* and *Common Native SHRUBS of Clallam County*.

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Site Preparation and Planting

There are two basic strategies for preparing a site for planting: 1) mowing and scalping and 2) complete site renovation. Mowing and scalping requires the least amount of work initially but significantly more maintenance over the first five years. Complete site renovation requires careful planning and considerable upfront work prior to planting. The decision of when to plant trees and shrubs depends on the type of plants being planted.

Fall is the Best Time to Plant

Bare-root stock can be planted only while dormant, usually January through April. Hardwood cuttings, such as stakes or whips of willow, cottonwood, red-osier dogwood, spirea, snowberry, or red-flowering currant must be planted while dormant. Containerized stock (potted, balled & burlapped or plugs) can be planted any time of year provided irrigation water is available.

Fall planting has numerous advantages over other times of the year. The soil is generally still warm enough for plant roots to get established. Fall rains will provide the necessary water for the new plantings. And, with winter dormancy approaching, water requirements are minimal.

In spring, plants are budding and vigorously putting out new growth, requiring increasing amounts of water as rains diminish. The roots are struggling to get established while above-ground growth is taking off. This makes it challenging for the plants to sustain their water and nutrient needs, thus intensifying transplant shock.

All new plantings need supplemental water throughout the growing season until they are well established (2-3 years). Water infrequently (once or twice per month) and deeply, soaking the entire root zone.

If you purchase bare-root seedlings during winter or early spring you do have options. You can put the plants in containers or a nursery bed for the first growing season and plant in the fall. This not only reduces the amount of time-sensitive work you must do when you first get your seedlings, it allows you time to do proper site preparation during the summer. Keep potted plants somewhere sheltered from desiccating winds and direct sunlight and near a source of irrigation water. Remember, seedlings in pots or a nursery require more frequent watering than seedlings in the ground. Therefore, if you are planting a relatively small area with ready access to irrigation water, you might as well skip the container or nursery option.

Site Preparation—Mowing and Scalping

Mowing and scalping is commonly done for large-scale plantings, such as reforestation and riparian restoration projects where site preparation costs can be prohibitive.

The site should be prepared by mowing the entire planting area—typically with a tractor mower or brush cutter. If the site is infested with noxious or invasive weeds, such as reed canarygrass, Himalayan blackberry, or quackgrass, spot treatment with herbicide may be warranted. A late spring followed by an early fall herbicide treatment is most effective.

Scalp the sod away for each planting hole. Dig holes roughly twice the diameter of the rootball. Plant, water and mulch. Mulching around each plant will inhibit weeds and conserve water. If you are planting in a grassy area, it is advisable to use plant protectors to protect against pesky rodents and weed whackers, and to help you find your plants when the grass gets tall.

Site Preparation—Complete Site Renovation

The entire planting area can be prepared by cultivating or sheet composting. Both methods are effective at reducing competition from grass and weeds and eliminating rodent habitat.

Cultivation, such as disking and tilling throughout the growing season will result in thorough control of undesirable grasses and weeds. Repeated cultivation kills the germinating weeds and rhizomes of invasive grasses. Planting a green manure crop of annual grain in conjunction with cultivation provides the added benefit of soil improvement when the grain is tilled under prior to transplanting seedlings in the fall.

Sheet composting is a good alternative where soil conditions make cultivation difficult. Cover the ground with layers of newspaper or cardboard and ordinary composting materials to a depth of 6-9 inches. The sheet composting functions much like any other mulch with the added benefit of killing the existing plants (provided they are not woody or spread by rhizomes or stolons) and creating good growing conditions for your new plants. Sheet composting is most effective if started in the fall. Trees and shrubs can be planted before or after sheet composting. Avoid piling mulch up to the stems of the new plants.